## Historical Background of the Cane River Area

Louisiana Settlement. René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle in 1682, claimed Louisiana for France. Near the end of the 17th century, King Louis XIV considered another venture in the New World. In 1698 he commissioned Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, and Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville II, to implement La Salle's original colonization plan for Louisiana.

Iberville readied an expedition force and departed from Brest, France, on October 24, 1698. The expedition reached the vicinity of Dauphin Island on the Gulf of Mexico on January 31, 1699. Eventually it settled near Biloxi, Mississippi, and later New Orleans, Louisiana. Iberville resolved to erect a number of forts and trading posts along the Mississippi and its tributaries.

In order to carry out this decision the next year, Bienville led an exploration of the Red River to open trade with local tribes. Accompanied by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, Bienville's group reached the vicinity of Natchitoches and established friendly contacts with the Caddo tribes. In 1702 Iberville returned to France to obtain more settlers, supplies, and military equipment for the colony.

Settlement of Natchitoches. The disappointing progress of the colony convinced King XIV to extricate himself from an unprofitable venture, an action accomplished by transferring Louisiana to the rich merchant Antoine Crozat, Marquis de

Chatel.

On September 14, 1712, the king officially granted Crozat exclusive trading rights and governing rights in Louisiana for 15 years. Under terms of the royal charter, the French government accepted part of the colonial expenditures for nine years. Crozat planned to more fully exploit the agricultural and commercial potential of the colony. In 1713, Crozat sent agents to revitalize trade with the Indians and to more efficiently administer colonial affairs. Among the agents dispatched was the new governor, Antoine de la Mothe, Cadillac. Cadillac in 1714 requested that St. Denis, a leader of the earlier French exploration to the Red River valley, return to that area for the purpose of establishing a French settlement. St. Denis chose the site that became the city of Natchitoches to construct Fort St. Jean Baptiste. Thus began the oldest permanent settlement in the present state of Louisiana (New Orleans was established in 1718). For many years this post served as an important strategic and trade center on the Red River. St. Denis was well suited for this task as he had both courage and tact and was well acquainted with the ways of the Indian frontier. During his tenure, St. Denis developed into a key figure in colonial affairs.

French Land Use Regulations. Cadillac's administration succeeded in attracting new settlers to the colony, which resulted in the need to develop a well-defined land grant system. The king in 1716 adopted a series of colonial land regulations, which stipulated that a land grant had to be

cleared within two years or else revert back to the crown. In addition, the land was to be two-thirds cleared before the original grantee could sell it.

These land concessions were categorized as being either general or special. A general concession designated any portion of the vacant lands for development while a special concession provided fixed boundaries for land grants. Early grantees received between 50 and 100 arpents (approximately 190 feet to the arpent) facing Red River. The decree of 1716 ordered unimproved land divided into sections of from two to four arpents each in front and extending back from the river a distance of 40 arpents. This system allowed each landholder to have some of the good natural levee land along with backswamp.

The river provided the focal point for settlement as it served as a transportation route upon which commerce and communication reached all parts of the colony. The presence of natural levees along the river led to the adoption of a linear settlement pattern, possibly based on European models, wherein the main structures of the plantations were found nearest the river, while the rear portions of the grants contained fields followed by swamps or woods. At river bends this type of settlement pattern led to the formation of pie-shaped land holdings rather than the usual rectangular sections. These land patterns can still be seen in the Cane River area.

A Frontier Economy. French Louisiana's commercial activities centered around the Indian trade. Because of the proximity to

Spanish Texas and the Indian nations, Natchitoches was ideally suited to a frontier market economy. Because a giant logjam called the Great Raft blocked Red River navigation above the settlement, Natchitoches was the northern terminus for traffic to and from downriver ports. In addition, the city's location near the Spanish Camino Real, a major east-west overland route, further enhanced its growth as a trade center.

Spanish Reaction. The French expansion in the Red River valley caused concern among Spanish authorities in east Texas, and in 1717, they countered the French settlement with one of their own: the mission post of Los Adaes. Located 14 miles southwest of Natchitoches, this outpost eventually became the capital of Spanish Texas. Proximity, necessity, and mutual profit resulted in a lively contraband trade relationship between those two communities, despite the opposing mercantile policies of both governments. The Spanish needed tobacco, medicine, liquor, firearms, salt, and other goods obtained through the Red River trade, while the French provided a ready market for Spanish silver and cattle.

France Loses Louisiana. The Seven Years' War, known in America as the French and Indian War, concluded in 1763 with the expulsion of France from North America. In 1762 during the course of the war, Spain was induced to enter on the side of France. The price for Spanish participation was the cession to Spain of Louisiana lands on the west bank of the Mississippi, including Natchitoches and those lands on the east bank below Bayou Manchac. This agreement was formalized by the Treaty of

Fontainebleau in 1762. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 further clarified the military and diplomatic results of the war.

Spanish Louisiana. The formal transfer of the colony from France to Spain did not occur until January 1767, and during this period resentment grew among the French settlers concerning Spanish administration of Louisiana. This displeasure resulted in a revolt against Spanish rule and the expulsion of the Spanish governor on November 1, 1768. For the next 10 months, the colony pursued an independent course free from any European control. The period of rebellious self-rule abruptly ended in July 1769, with the arrival at the mouth of the Mississippi of a Spanish fleet carrying Gen. Alejandro O'Reilly and an army of more than 2,000 soldiers. The rebellion quickly collapsed before this show of Spanish strength. This time Spanish authorities imposed Spanish law and government on the former French colony.

French fears of Spanish domination soon proved unfounded. The new regime caused little visible change in daily life. At Natchitoches, the Spanish retained the services of the French commandant, Anthanase De Mezieres, son-in-law of St. Denis and brother-in-law of the Duc d'Orleans. An able administrator and an expert in Indian affairs, De Mezieres played an important role in the development of the Louisiana-Texas border region during the following decade. De Mezieres's Indian expertise was especially valuable as Spain had the difficult task of bringing the Louisiana tribes under their influence without starting a protracted and debilitating conflict.

In order to attract Indian commerce, De Mezieres persuaded the government to abandon the system of Indian control through missionary work and adopt the French method of trade and presents. By doing so, he succeeded in maintaining relative stability in the Red River valley throughout the period of Spanish dominion.

Commercial agriculture based on tobacco and indigo production replaced earlier frontier economy, although animal skins and products remained a staple of the Natchitoches economy. During this time, farmers adopted the plantation system and formed large agricultural units worked by slave labor. By 1776, Natchitoches Parish had a slave population of nearly 4,000.

The United States Purchases Louisiana. The king of Spain in the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1800 ceded Louisiana back to France, an action reconfirmed in 1801 in the Treaty of Madrid. Actual transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France was delayed until November 1803. In the light of these developments, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson instructed his minister to France, Robert R. Livingston, to negotiate with French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte for the purchase of Louisiana. This resulted in the Louisiana Purchase and France turning over Louisiana territory to the United States in December 1803.

President Jefferson dispatched two exploration parties under Zebulon Pike and Thomas Freeman, respectively, to reconnoiter the Red River. Both groups were particularly interested in the area between Natchitoches and the Sabine River, which had been a

disputed area between the French and Spanish. The border question was raised again with the U.S. purchase of Louisiana. In 1806, American forces established themselves east of Arroyo Hondo (a small stream just west of Natchitoches), with Spain forces on the west bank of the Sabine River. This created a "neutral strip," which became a haven for outlaws, bandits, fugitive slaves, and filibusters gathering for the invasion of Texas. In 1821 a series of treaties resulted in the boundary between the two countries being fixed at the Sabine River. Soon the U.S. government established several new forts on the Louisiana frontier. Lt. Col. Zachary Taylor commanded the Seventh Infantry to construct Fort Seldon, which was occupied for four months between 1821 and 1822 until a more strategic site was selected. The new site was 14 miles to the southwest and named Fort Jesup. Fort Jesup remained a significant American frontier post until the Mexican War.

Plantation Society. After the area became part of the United States, plantation society, including the institution of slavery, flourished along the Red River for a number of reasons. In 1810 cotton was introduced into the Red River, but prosperity came to the area with the twin technological developments of the steamboat and the cotton gin.

A series of events resulted in the decline of Natchitoches, including the removal of the log raft above the city by Henry Shreve and the subsequent establishment of Shreveport, which eventually superseded Natchitoches as a major port and trade center; the Red River's gradual abandonment of the channel,

which ran by the city and plantations in Natchitoches Parish; the westward expansion of the United States; and the American Civil War and its consequences.

Control of Shreveport and the cotton supplies of the Red River valley were the primary motivations for the Red River campaign, one of Louisiana's most famous Civil War engagements. The campaign began in the spring of 1864 with a military force under Union Gen. Nathanial Banks pushing Confederate forces under Gen. Richard Taylor slowly north along the Red River. A series of skirmishes and battles were fought, which included areas near Cloutierville and Magnolia Plantation. This fighting culminated with the battle at Pleasant Hill. The Union forces retreated and the Confederates remained in control of the area until the end of the Civil War.

Impact on Native Populations of European Settlement. During a century of dominion, the French and Spanish left a lasting imprint on Louisiana: they introduced Catholicism, developed land use patterns, and initiated an economic system that superseded the one developed by Native Americans. In order to develop the colonial economy, the white settlers required both territorial control and the cooperation of the Indian populations. The French distributed gifts through Indian traders and agents in order to court local tribes; the Spanish used mission outposts. And for both nations, a small display of military force did much to ensure the security of their New World investments. Eventually, the increasing pressure of

European settlement and the European and American policies towards Indians resulted in the destruction of Indian lifeways and eventually their removal from the Cane River area.

Creole Culture. The term "Creole" is used to refer to a number of diverse cultural groups. The white Creoles of colonial Louisiana were born of French or Spanish parents before 1803. They were landed gentry who adopted and retained European mannerisms, and enjoyed a cultured and sophisticated lifestyle.

The Cane River Creoles of color emerged from a family of freed slaves, some of whom became wealthy from their plantations, developed their own unique culture, and enjoyed the respect and friendship of the dominant white Creole society. The social stratum occupied by Creoles of color was unique to Louisiana. In the context of racial mixing, Creole could refer to those of European-Indian bloodline.

Native American Cultures. One Indian tribe was identified as considering the resources in the Cane River area as significant. The state park people remembered that some members of the Caddo tribe from Oklahoma may occasionally use a site in the Los Adaes State Commemorative Area for traditional ceremonies. The study team was unsuccessful in contacting members of the Caddo tribe. If any further federal action is taken in the Cane River area, an ethnographic survey should be undertaken.

## Historic Resources

Photographs of the resources evaluated, except for Los Adaes

and Fort Jesup state commemorative areas, Kate Chopin House (Bayou Folk Museum), and Beau Fort Plantation, are grouped together at the end of this section. Site plans are also included for Natchitoches Historic District and Oakland and Magnolia plantations.

Natchitoches Historic District (National Historic Landmark). In 1690, French explorer Henri de Tonti arrived in the Indian village of Natchitoches. In 1714, three years before New Orleans was founded, another Frenchman, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, ordered the first substantial dwellings to be built in Natchitoches. This established the first permanent settlement in what became the vast Louisiana Purchase Territory. As the settlement grew, active trade began with the Spanish. When Natchitoches became an outpost for the Spanish government in 1764, there was little concern for the colony's French Creoles. They had been trading with the Spanish since the founding of the city. This became part of the United States in 1803, and by this time, Creole planters were building more pretentious structures using traditional "bousillage" construction (a building technique that used wood frame, e.g., upright and angular posts, infilled with Spanish moss and mud). The city of Natchitoches continued as an important trading and navigation center on the Red River. In 1825 the Red River began changing course and continued to do so until 1849 when the old river channel was abandoned and Cane River Lake was formed. Steamboat traffic to the city was possible only during periods of high water.

The plan for the city was developed from property lines

radiating from the river. In the late 1700s, these property lines became streets, and later were intersected by other streets forming rectangular blocks. The area retains the atmosphere of a rural town with well-kept lawns and homes. Pride of ownership in this area is evident, and in recent years restoration work has been undertaken by private individuals. The business and residential areas are clearly defined due to early zoning restrictions. Front Street, which stretches the length of the business district, is brick paved and overlooks Cane River Lake. The bank is terraced down to the river and landscaped with crepe myrtles and oaks. Most of the opposite bank, also landscaped, belongs to the city. The area in the old town section is low density. Old trees dot the landscape in the business district. Buildings that have gone up in recent years have been designed to be compatible with the surroundings. Only those streets that run east and west are straight. Other streets are narrow and crooked, giving the appearance of quaintness since most of the dwellings were built at angles to the street.

The historic district has a mixture of architecture from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. About 60 buildings and places of interest or historic note are located within the district.

Kate Chopin House (National Historic Landmark). This building was originally constructed in the early 1800s. Home of Alexis Cloutier, for whom Cloutierville was named, and later Kate Chopin, American author of Creole stories, it is an example of a raised Louisiana cottage illustrating French construction

methods. The structure represents a typical house used in small rural communities by Creoles. The complex includes a restored blacksmith shop, a building that served as a doctor's office, and other relics of past life in the Cane River area.

Melrose Plantation - National Historic Landmark. Established in 1796 by a former slave who became a wealthy businesswoman, the plantation was developed by Creoles of color over several generations. A number of famous artists, including Clementine Hunter, and writers, including Francois Mignon, spent time at the plantation.

Today the buildings of Melrose Plantation include the big house, the African house behind it, the yucca house, the Ghana house, the writers' cabin, the weaving house, the bindery, and the barn. The African house, an unusual structure with an umbrella-like roof, and Ghana house contain features that are similar to structures in the Caribbean and Africa. Except for the writers' cabin, the weaving house, and the bindery, all the buildings are on their original sites. The three exceptions were moved to Melrose by Mrs. Cammie Garrett Henry, the last private owner. They are old buildings from the vicinity but not original to this plantation.

Los Adaes State Commemorative Area - National Historic Landmark. The Spanish founded this presidio in 1721 to check French expansion into east Texas. It played a part in maintaining the international balance of power between Spain and France. This presidio served as an administrative capitol for

the province of Texas from 1751 to 1770 before being abandoned in 1773. Los Adaes, or Nuestra Senora del Pilar de los Adaes, is one of the few Spanish presidios in the borderlands that has not been affected by modern agricultural practices or urban expansion. The site of the main presidio and associated buildings is owned by the state; the mission site is located on private land and is currently used as pastureland. The presidio remains are located on a low ridge. The area of the site is an open field surrounded by pine forest. It has never been cultivated, and archeological remains are abundant and in place. Los Adaes provides opportunities to study, research, and interpret life at a Spanish colonial frontier settlement, including European-Indian interdependency.

Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area - National Historic Landmark. Fort Jesup was the most southwesterly military outpost in the United States from its establishment in 1822 until the Mexican War. In March 1845, Texas was offered admission to the Union and Gen. Zachary Taylor's "Army of Observation," stationed at Fort Jesup, was ordered to hold its troops ready to march into Texas. After Texas joined the Union, Taylor was ordered to move into the new state.

After the sale of the lots and buildings of Fort Jesup at the auctions of 1850, 1875, 1880, and 1885, the great stone and log garrison structures were torn down, removed, or gradually deteriorated. By 1929 only one building remained, the kitchen. The roof and floor were nearly all gone, and the crumbling foundation threatened the collapse of the entire structure.

Local interest in the history of Fort Jesup provided funds for the restoration of this building. In replacing the roof, hand-riven cypress boards were used and the original handwrought hinges and nails reused. The old rock chimney was rebuilt, decaying members were replaced with hewn logs, and sills were replaced where needed. A new floor of rough oak boards was laid and the stone foundation was also replaced. The extent of the park around this structure was 3 acres.

In 1957, Fort Jesup State Monument was established, consisting of 20.5 acres. The original restored building was refurnished with period reproductions and authentic pots, pans, and utensils. One of the officers' quarters has been reconstructed for use as a visitor center and park administrative office, with exhibits designed to tell the story of the fort. The area has also undergone extensive landscaping.

Oakland Plantation. The plantation house of Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme was most likely constructed by slaves beginning in 1821. It has been occupied by seven generations of the Prud'homme family. Many of the original outbuildings for this plantation are intact. Many of the surviving structures including the French colonial main house are examples of bousillage construction. Also important is the landscape, which contains an 1835 bottle garden, a formal entranceway, and intact agricultural fields.

The plantation setting is open and flat, and the only change in elevation occurs at the riverbanks, where there is a drop of

a few feet. The only intrusion in the area is a small metal truss bridge; however, this is not a major feature in the landscape.

The main house is set at the head of a short alley of live oaks behind a small formal garden. The parternes are outlined in various kinds of bottles - crock bottles from Scotland, square bitters bottles, round bottom beer bottles from Ireland, torpedo-shaped bottles from England, and wine bottles from France. The main house is a large hip roof, raised cottage, with surrounding galleries and 28 chamfered posts. The three dormers on the front are original. Most rooms have double French doors. The interior walls are paneled with random-width boards. Only one of the original mantels remains - a comparatively plain Greek Revival wooden mantel in one of the bedrooms. The finer marble mantels cracked and were replaced with plain wooden mantels in 1915. Most of the transom doors and floorboards are original.

The plantation includes several outbuildings. The old store - a frame, gable-fronted building - dates from the Civil War era. Behind the store is the carriage house, an old but nondescript frame building, which was converted into a machine shop in 1960. There are two frame hip roof pigeonniers at opposite ends of the access lane and a small log carpenter's shop with half dovetail joints at the corners. Behind the carpenter's shop is an old frame barn that was once a smokehouse; the smoked and charred beams remain. The overseer's house is a raised cottage that has been re-sided. The largest residence other than the plantation

house is the doctor's house, a five-bay frame cottage with a pitched roof. Though much reworked, it still contributes to the overall appearance of the plantation.

Magnolia Plantation. The main plantation house of Ambrose LeComte was most likely constructed by slaves in the 1830s. The large plantation house was burned in 1864 by the army of Union General Banks as they retreated to Alexandria after the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. Construction of the plantation house was completed in 1899 in an amalgam of Greek Revival and Italianate.

Magnolia Plantation is set along Cane River Lake amid 10 acres of open flat farmland. The big house is surrounded by several 150-year-old live oaks and magnolia trees. The house itself is approached by means of a gravel driveway set on axis with the central front door.

Although the present plantation house dates from 1899, it partially follows the plan of the house that previously occupied the site. The raised plantation house has one principal floor, under a large pitched roof garret. The five-bay plan has a central hall and double parlors with chimneys set between them. There is also a front gallery and a rear gallery that encompasses not only the house but also a rear wing. The house, traditional in form and plan, is large and plain with square post galleries, transom panel doors, and simple Renaissance Revival mantels. The upstairs walls are entirely sheathed in narrow gauge wainscotting with plain mantels. All doors have

four panels and windows are sash mounted. The 2½-story structure contains 27 rooms and an extensive collection of Southern Empire and Louisiana furniture.

The plantation includes a number of important outbuilding and dependencies, such as an overseer's house, slave quarters cabins, a plantation store, a corn crib, a blacksmith shop, a pigeonnier, and a cotton press-gin building. The cotton press-gin building contains a rare cotton press and two types of gins. These remnants of a working plantation are invaluable in understanding southern antebellum agricultural practices. The unusually large overseer's house is a hip-roof, raised Acadian cottage, which is almost completely surrounded by square post galleries. This structure served as the family residence after the Civil War to the reconstruction of the large plantation house. Modifications to the overseer's house include the tin roof and the interior, which is much reworked. The transom, doors, windows, and shutters remain.

Of the original slave dwellings, eight remain in a double row in the southeast portion of the plantation. These are brick, two-room, galleried houses with central chimneys and gable parapets - unusually high quality construction for slave cabins. Each fireplace has an iron lintel. There has been some deterioration, including the loss of several parapets, chimney tops, windows, and doors. In addition, some gallery roofs have collapsed. The cotton press dates back to ca. 1830 and is one of about five or six comparable examples in the South. This building also contains 19th century ginning equipment. In

addition, the landscape of fields and woodlands surrounding the plantation are intact.

Badin-Roque House. The Badin-Roque House is set on flat farmland adjacent to Cane River Lake, approximately 10 miles south-southeast of the city of Natchitoches. It probably was constructed in the early 19th century as a poteaux en terre (posts in the ground) cottage with two front rooms of unequal size and two rear cabins with a small space between. This structure typified bousillage construction techniques. The house had a single central chimney and a dirt floor. In the 1830s a beaded tongue and groove ceiling was added as was much of the present board and batten fenestration. In about 1850 the present pitched roof and siding was added. In addition, the small rear gallery was enclosed and a 9 over 6 window installed. In the 20th century, the present tin roof covering was installed. The structure is stable, but some of the studs have tilted and the brick fireplaces have partially crumbled.

Cherokee Plantation. The Cherokee Plantation house dates from the 1820s and is named for the Cherokee roses in the front yard. It is typical of early Louisiana plantations and reflects the lifestyles of French planters. South and west of the house are three very old barns, one a "log crib." Across the road on the riverbank facing the big house is a slave cabin with the original fireplace. This has been restored for caretakers, but the style and flavor have been preserved.

Beau Fort Plantation. Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme began

building this plantation in 1830 for his son, L. Narcisse Prud'homme. It has been modernized with a several additions including a patio, a breakfast room, a kitchen, and storage rooms.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Commemorative Area. Louis
Juchereau de St. Denis supervised the construction of a small
structure in 1713 known as Fort St. Jean Baptiste. This post
served as the center for French trading activities as well as
presenting a challenge to Spanish authority in the area and
stands on a rough boundary between French Louisiana and Spanish
Texas. The Spanish responded to this by establishing a military
post and religious mission among the Adaes Indians approximately
15 miles west of the French fort. The fort was moved from an
island in the Red River (now Cane River Lake) to the west bank.
After 1803 the fort was abandoned and torn down. The Louisiana
Office of State Parks in 1971-72 purchased the site of this
post. Construction of a replica fort began in 1980 and was
completed in 1981.

1. Cane River Environmental Impact Report - National Park Service